

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CAIRO 01643 130940Z

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2108

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 1643

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, EG

SUBJ: EGYPTIAN LABOR FEDERATION SEEKS DIRECT RELATIONS WITH
AFL/CIO

SUMMARY. EGYPTIAN LABOR FEDERATION OFFICIAL BRIEFED VISITING
REGIONAL LABATT ON FORTHCOMING MAJOR TRADE UNION REFORMS DESIGNED
TO ENLARGE EGYPTIAN LABOR'S INDEPENDENCE FROM GOVERNMENT AND ASU
PARTY AND TO INTRODUCE LARGER MEASURE OF DEMOCRACY WITH LABOR
MOVEMENT. OFFICIAL WENT ON TO EXPRESS STRONG INTEREST OF FEDERATION
LEADERS IN DEVELOPING DIRECT RELATIONS WITH AFL/CIO. ACKNOWLEDGING
THAT ONE-TIME EGYPTIAN PRACTICE OF PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO
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PAGE 02 CAIRO 01643 130940Z

AMERICAN AND OTHER LABOR ORGANIZATIONS THAT BACKED ISRAEL HAD

BEEN ERROR WHICH ULTIMATELY HURT EGYPTIANS BY ISOLATING THEM FROM WESTERN LABOR, HE ASSERTED THAT FEDERATION HAD DECIDED TO SEEK BETTER TIES WITH UNIONS OF WEST, AND NOTABLY US LABOR, WITHOUT REGARD TO THEIR SUPPORT OF ISRAEL. AT CURRENT STATE OF MAJOR REFORMS, HE CONCLUDED, EGYPTIAN TRADE-UNIONISTS HAVE SPECIAL INTEREST--AND NEED--FOR EXPOSURE TO IDEAS AND PRACTICES OF AMERICAN LABOR. EMBASSY AND LAB ATT REQUEST THAT DEPT (1) INFORM AFL/CIO AND AAFLI OF CONTENTS OF THIS MESSAGE AND (2) RECOMMEND THAT AFL/CIO CONSIDER SENDING AAFLI REP TO CAIRO FOR EXPLORATORY TALKS ON POSSIBLE RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING CAIRO VISIT, REGIONAL LABATT WAS BRIEFED BY GAMAL EMAM, DIRECTOR OF INTERNTAIONAL RELATIONS DEPARTMENT OF EGYPTIAN LABOR FEDERATION, ON CURRENT PLANS AND VIEWS OF EGYPTIAN LABOR.

2. ACCORDING TO EMAM, FEDERATION IS CURRENTLY REVIEWING NEW GOVERNMENT-DRAFTED TRADE UNION LAW WHICH WILL EFFECT MAJOR CHANGES WITHIN LABOR MOVEMENT. DRAFT LAW WILL NOTABLY ENLARGE ORGANIZED LABOR'S INDEPENDENCE FROM GOVERNMENT (ELIMINATING, FOR EXAMPLE, REQUIREMENT OF PRIOR OFFICIAL APPROVAL FOR HOLDING OF UNION MEETINGS) AS WELL AS ASU PARTY (CANDIDATES FOR UNION OFFICE NEED NO LONGER BE PARTY MEMBERS). IN ADDITION, DRAFT LAW WILL INTRODUCE LARGER MEASURE OF DEMOCRATIZATION WITHIN TRADE UNIONS. EXISTING RULES WHICH LIMIT ELECTIVE POSTS TO WORKERS WITH NO MORE THAN SECONDARY EDUCATION WILL BE DROPPED, THEREBY OPENING WAY FOR BETTER EDUCATED MEMBERS TO ACCEDE TO RESPONSIBLE UNION POSITION. LIKewise, ROLE OF UNION OFFICERS AT WORKING LEVEL, I.E, SHOP STEWARDS, WILL BE STRENGTHENED IN ORDER TO MAKE UNIONS MORE RESPONSIVE TORANK-AND-FILE AND COUNTER LONGSTANDING PATTERN OF UNION "BOSSISM" FROM THE TOP.

3. EMAM CHARACTERIZED DRAFT LAW AS SIGNIFICANT STEP TO MORE ORGANIZED LABOR AWAY FROM NASSERIST MODEL OF RIGIDLY-CONTROLLED INSTITUTION AND TOWARDS RELATIVELY FREE ENTITY, IN KEEPING WITH LIBERALIZATION THRUST OF SADAT REGIME. ALTHOUGH DRAFT TEXT REMAINS SUBJECT TO SOME REVISION (EMAM INDICATED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT FEDERATION LEADERS WANT TO BALANCE DEMOCRATIZATION MEASURES WITH SAFEGUARD TO PREVENT LEFTISTS FROM GAINING ELECTIVE POSTS AND INFLUENCE), EMAM FORESAW ENACTMENT OF LAW BY TPLES ASSEMBLY IN COURSE OF 1975 AND IN TIME FOR APPLICATION BEFORE UNION ELECTIONS
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PAGE 03 CAIRO 01643 130940Z

SLATED FOR LATE YEAR.

4. EMAM WENT ON TO SAY THAT FEDERATION, IN CONTEXT OF PENDING REFORMS, WAS STRONGLY INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING RELATIONS WITH AFL/CIO IN ORDER TO BENEFIT FROM AMERICAN LABOR IDEAS AND PRACTICES. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PAST EGYPTIAN PRACTICE OF OPENLY ATTACKING US AND OTHER LABOR ORGANIZATIONS WITH CLOSE TIES TO ISRAEL WAS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ABSENCE OF DIRECT US-EGYPTIAN

LABOR RELATIONS--AND HAD BEEN ERROR THAT HAD ULTIMATELY HURT AND ISOLATED EGYPTIANS FROM WEST. EMAM ASSERTED THAT FEDERATION HAD NOW DECIDED TO SEEK BETTER TIES WITH WESTERN LABOR--AND ESPECIALLY THE AFL/CIO--WITHOUT REGARD FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF ISRAEL.

5. EMAM SAID THAT FEDERATION WOULD LIKE TO INITIATE DIRECT CONTACT THROUGH VISIT TO CAIRO BY AMERICAN TRADE-UNIONIST AT LEVEL AFL/CIO DEEMS SUITABLE. IF AFL/CIO IS RECEPTIVE TO IDEA, FEDERATION WOULD BE PREPARED TO RESPOND TO SIGNAL (SUCH AS, HE SUGGESTED, BRIEF LETTER FROM AAFLI, WHICH HE UNDERSTOOD WAS ACTIVE IN ARAB WORLD, ENCLOSING A COPY OF AAFLI BROCHURE) BY EXTENDING VISIT INVITATION IN RESPONSE. ONCE AMERICAN LABOR HAD FIRSTHAND EXPOSURE TO CHANGES IN EGYPT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONS, EMAM WAS CONVINCED THAT RELATIONSHIP WOULD ENSUE.

6. COMMENTS: LABATT FOUND EMAM FRIENDLY, FORTHRIGHT AND ALMOST CERTAINLY SPEAKING FOR FEDERATION LEADERSHIP. IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION, SENIOR MANPOWER MINISTRY OFFICIAL AFFIRMED THAT EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD ALSO WELCOME DIRECT US-EGYPTIAN LABOR TIES. FURTHER CONFIRMATION OF CHANGED EGYPTIAN ATTITUDE WAS PROVIDED BY IMPRESSIVE YOUNG MAN RECENTLY NAMED TO HEAD UP FEDERATION'S EXTENSIVE TRAINING ACTIVITIES. HE BLUNTLY TOLD LABATT THAT EGYPTIANS WANT TO ADOPT AMERICAN LABOR IDEAS AND PRACTICES AS ANTIDOTE--AND EVENTUAL SUBSTITUTE--FOR STILL PERVASIVE MARXIST IDEOLOGY IN LABOR AND ITS TRAINING. ON HIS OWN, HE INTENDED TO BEGIN TRANSLATING AMERICAN MATERIAL FOR TRAINING USE. OVER LONG TERM, HOWEVER, HE WANTED TO REPLACE DYED-IN-THE-WOOL MARXISTS AMONG TRAINING STAFF WITH BRIGHT YOUNG EGYPTIANS WHO COULD HOPEFULLY HAVE DIRECT EXPOSURE TO US LABOR.

7. EMBASSY AND LABATT SEE ATTRACTIVE--AND POTENTIALLY HISTORIC--OPPORTUNITY FOR AFL/CIO TO DEVELOP HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP AT
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PAGE 04 CAIRO 01643 130940Z

AUSPICIOUS TIME WITH MOST INFLUENTIAL LABOR MOVEMENT IN ARAB WORLD. DEPT IS ACCORDINGLY REQUESTED TO (1) INFORM AFL/CIO OF CONTENTS OF THIS MESSAGE AND (2) RECOMMEND THAT AFL/CIO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER SENDING OUT AAFLI REP TO CAIRO FOR EXPLORATORY TALKS AND FIRSTHAND EVALUATION OF POTENTIAL FOR RELATIONS.
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